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(non-members)

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Tiger Snakes

When I hustled late into the meeting of Naturalists writing our Club's box/ironbark submission I excused myself on the basis that I had to persuade a large Tiger Snake that it was an unwelcome visitor on our front patio, a couple of metres from our front door. I thought it was the largest we had had in the garden, and later measurement confirmed a **minimum** length of 115 cm.

I have mentioned previously that the older folk in our district speak about Brown and Black Snakes as the the "usual" for our area. They believe that the Tiger Snakes have "moved down the Channel (reserve)". I have not seen a Brown Snake for at least five years here, and have never seen a Black in the 12 years I've been here. Tiger Snakes we see "frequently" - I'd estimate a minimum of 6 per year in the house garden alone. This season there have been surprisingly few - this one is n°4.

I got out the Conservation and Environment/Museum of Victoria 1991 publication, "Snakes of Victoria" by A.J.Coventry and Peter Robertson to see how our latest visitor shaped up.

" The Tiger Snake may grow to about 1.5 metres, although specimens over one metre are not common. Its major prey items are frogs (our garden has an excellent population of Pobblebonks and Eastern Toadlets) *" but a wide variety of small vertebrates are also taken,"* (We've also a lovely crew of skinks and mice) *"and it has been observed climbing trees to feed on young birds."* (A couple of weeks ago the sparrows nesting in a Hardenbergia which densly surrounds one of our verandah posts were disturbed after dark. One very distressed bird squarked alarmingly for quite some time. It obviously did not flutter off. Despite tentative probes we did not actually see the predator. Last year I did disturb a Tiger in this same creeper i.e. off the ground)
"It is generally a diurnal species, but it is often active on warm nights" (Agreed)

"It is viparous and normally has a litter size of between 15 and 40 but there are anecdotal accounts of much larger litters" (Gosh!!)
"Extremely dangerous." (!!!!!!!!Please, please, have Dog understand that!)

I was very surprised to see that although the distribution map reprinted from the Atlas of Victorian Wildlife and Museum of Victoria has "probable distribution area" all over Victoria except the semi-arid north west, there were no confirmed records for this area. I'm sure our Vet would also be surprised. Suspect and real Tiger bite Vet treatment is very expensive ($56 - $400+) and traumatic.

Our last visitor was one of the noisy ones with a very penetrating hiss. Our geese seem to delight in spooking me. They can imitate a Tiger Snake very well . There was a Tiger which curled up on a warm night in the middle of our car port and attracted my attention from many metres away by its "barking". Local gossip says this is not uncommon when Tigers are in residence in pump sheds.

And you wonder why I seldom wear sandals any more?

Margaret Hunter.

Dry Diggings Track

The Dry Diggings Track is the part of the Great Dividing Trail, and runs from Castlemaine to Daylesford, via Fryerstown, Vaughan, Mt Franklin and Hepburn. On Saturday Feb. 21 I joined the walkers leaving from the corner of Hargreaves and Forest streets at 9 am. We walked to the south end of Wheeler St and followed the track along the Poverty Gully water race until we were almost to the Monk. From the track there were some lovely views across to Mount Alexander in particular. The race is interesting in itself, having been constructed by hand in the late 1870s. There wasn't much in flower, and we didn't get to explore, of course, but there were some small daisies along the race near the water, and mistletoe, possibly Drooping Mistletoe (I didn't get a chance to pick some to check) was also flowering. Choughs were seen, and Rufous Whistlers and Spotted Pardalotes were heard, but I think that 28 walkers was a bit daunting for most birds.

We had morning tea on the Monk, some people going up to the top for theirs, and they were rewarded, not only by a magnificent view, but by the sight of Rainbow Bee-eaters.

The trail goes around the back of the Monk down to Spring Gully, passing the stone walls of Cobb and Co's horse paddock on the way at Eureka, opposite the Dingo Farm. The old mines and ruins at Spring Gully are now well "labelled" and the Dry Diggings Track brochure that some of us bought at the beginning of the walk helped add to the interest

of the gully.

After climbing several stiles and following the well marked track we came into Fryerstown at about 12.30pm and settled down under a shady tree not far from the hall for our lunch break. There were quite a few birds nearby, but the only ones I managed to identify were Crimson Rosellas, Galahs and Magpies.

A little after one o'clock we crossed the road and went down the road opposite. Sometimes we were walking near the Fryerstown/Glenluce Road, sometimes in the bush. As we crossed a creek by some steep steps we helped ourselves to blackberries to tide us over until afternoon tea time. We crossed the Campbells Creek road, into the bush again, and found ourselves having to give way to a fellow in a little four wheel drive, and further in the bush there was a ute parked. This was all in old goldmining areas, particularly where sluicing had been done, and they were spending the afternoon with their metal detectors. We crossed the Yapeen road, again into the bush and finally walked into Vaughan Springs, passing above Central Springs, at 20 to 3. The Naturalists felt we had walked too fast, and the Walkers thought we'd taken ages, but we all enjoyed the walk just the same, and sat down for a well earned cuppa while we watched some odd looking wrens - young males which were just changing into their bright blue and black.

Parts of the trail would make a wonderful walk during the spring, and for those interested in the history of the mining era it is a walk that is full of interest, and would take longer than the few hours we took!

At the moment the club is preparing a submission to the ECC regarding the use of the box-ironbark woodlands and forests, and the Fryers Ridge/Porcupine Ridge/Monk block is one of the areas that needs protection. There is a wealth of flora and fauna through this area, as well as the historcal sites, but its timber and history also puts it at risk. The Federal Government "benchmark" is that 15% of the original area of each forest type should be protected in conservation reserves. As only 15% of the original Box-ironbark woodlands and forests remain as public land, the club is proposing that all box-ironbark on public land in the Castlemaine/Maldon area be placed into a Reserve system, taking into account its historical heritage and its diversity of flora and fauna.

Rita Mills

THE NEXT G.D.T. Public Walk is on Sun. Mar. 22, leaving Vaughan Springs at 9am and finishing at Mt Franklin crater 7-8 hours later, and is graded easy - medium. Suitable footwear, clothing, food and drinks are essential. Contact Ed Butler, 5348 2367(b.h.) or 5348 2825 (a.h.) at least 4 days in advance for details and any special arrangements.

$6000 Grant for Cape Broom Removal

Parks Victoria has allocated the sum of $6000 to the C.F.N.C. to be spent on the clearing of Cape Broom from the area in the north-west corner of the Botanical Gardens. This is the area in which the endangered Eltham Copper Butterfly is found. Recent studies have suggested that the Castlemaine population is the largest known of this particular butterfly, therefore it is important that the conditions preferred by the butterfly be maintained.

The preferred food plant of the larvae is the Sweet Bursaria, Bursaria spinosa, so the aim is to clear away the invading Cape Broom so that the Bursaria can florish and, if necessary, be replanted in areas which have been covered for some years in Cape Broom.

Our success in gaining this grant is due to the detailed submission prepared by Chris Morris, who obtained all the required information and enlisted the necessary support of Council and D.R.N.E. Chris is currently organising the on-going work which needs to be done to take advantage of the Grant, and ensuring that the measures fall within the prescribed guidelines, and that expenses incurred are met before the expiry date.

If you have not recently visited the area, take a stroll through that part of the gardens. You can enter from the Mary Street end, or walk over the new footbridge near the fish hatchery.

George Broadway.

Babblings from Barkers Creek #8

Eagles in the Sky

Our house Magpies, Marjorie and Kennet, can, through their calls, indicate the presence of an eagle within their territory. However, this year's fledgling, Olivia, often tries to imitate the same call but I have had little confidenece in her alarms, for I have frequently checked the sky without sighting the offending eagle.

Nevertheless, she had become so persistent on occasions that I decided to take the time to really check the sky out in detail. I was proved wrong. For there, near to the early afternoon sun, was a circling Wedge-tailed Eagle. How astute! The eagle's prey would be blinded as I had been by the glare of the sun. I have now learnt to seek out the Wedge-tails once the day has warmed and the air currents are available to help them float so effortlessly above our heads.

Why don't you check out the sky near the early afternoon sun?

Northern Ireland

Each morning I feed our Magpies on the front patio, and as I walk out of the house they fly in to greet me, now of course joined by this years' young, Olivia.

However, our Grey Currawongs also have two fledglings and they are interested in partaking of the morning feast, too, much to the Magpies' disgust, and with great huffing and puffing up of their feathers the Magpies have a temporary victory.

In an attempt at a peace accord I then started to feed the Magpies first, then quickly dash through the house and out to the back garden where I could feed the Currawongs. This had the desired effect, but only for a few days. The male Magpie, Kennet, quickly worked out my strategy and would promptly call in the clan to take possession of the rear breakfast. The Currawongs, not to be outdone, would hold the ground at a distance and whenever an opportunity presented itself they would sprint in for a crumb or two. But, by the end of week one, the Currawongs had worked out that the Magpies could not defend both repasts at the same time. So when the Magpies arrived in the back yard the Currawongs then circled the house to the front patio for their breakfast.

As you will have guessed by now the Magpies soon realised what was going on. So now we frequently have this swirling mass of birds chasing each other around and around the house. I thought I might e-mail Molly Mowlan for some ideas on a peace accord.

John Turnbull.

Birds, 61 Hunter Street, February.

The bird bath is so popular at present that it requires constant scrubbing and filling to provide for the many visitors. A family of wrens, parents and three very fragile looking young, were bouncing in and out of the bath from an overhanging shrub, and frolicking under the nearby hose with obvious delight. Early next morning there were eight of them feeding on the rather dried up "lawn" area. The Yellow-rumped Thornbills seem to find good "grazing" in the same spot - possibly seeds?

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, and Eastern Spinebills and a pair of Grey Fantails appear regularly morning and evening along with New Holland Honeyeaters and one or two Silvereyes.

Screeching Corellas fly over to roost in the huge Sugar Gum at "Buda" from which the Galahs seem to have disappeared, after many battles. A Bronzewing calls mournfully from the garden at "Buda" also,

and is sometimes seen feeding on wattle seeds under a tree on the nature strip a couple of blocks away.

We placed some sunflower seeds in a feeding dish for the rosellas, but the Easterns are only allowed to sit and watch as the aggressive Crimsons polish the seeds off.

A Grey Shrike-thrush visits occasionally in the early morning, and the general impression right now is that most of the birds are really hungry, as well as thirsty.

Shirley Parnaby

Inaugural Meeting of the CFNC

While rummaging through some old correspondence today I came across the roll for the club's first meeting on Feb 18, 1976, i.e. 22 years ago exactly. Here they are, in the order in which they signed:-

C. Baldwin (Mrs)
Joyce Chapman
F. McIver (Miss)
F. Aulich
John Bradfield
Chris Every
Lloyd Bransgrove
D. Bransgrove (Mrs)
J.M.Winterbottom (Mrs)
Joan Buntine
C. McDougall (Mrs)
Rita Mills
George Broadway
Geoff Sitch
Ronald Renn
Ern Perkins
Arthur Carr
Don Walker
Harold Parnaby
Max Winterbottom
Barry Golding (Daylesford)

One person who did not sign was the convenor of the meeting, Ray Bradfield.

It was resolved at the meeting that the membership fee would be $3 single and $5 family.

The secretary, Rita Mills, was instructed to write to the L.C.C. seeking further information on their investigation of this area, and asking for a speaker on the subject to come and address one of our meetings if possible. (So what is new?)

George Broadway
Feb 16, 1998

Observations

* Seen by John Levers at his property at Norward Hill on 25/1, a Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo in a pine tree.
* Col Blume noted the behaviour of some Galahs at the Camp Reserve late last year and is wondering if it is their usual behaviour when

joining a feeding flock? As the newcomers arrived they were screeching and flew into the elms next to the oval before gliding down onto the ground to begin feeding. The others just continued to feed. Was the screeching a contact call to let the flock know that they were "friends" and not a raptor?

* Margaret Hunter delightedly reports that the Yellow Robins which nested in their garden have decided to stay on. The family of four is now just two birds again, Margaret thinks one of the original pair and one of the young ones. She also reports that the three Wedgetails are still well and healthy and soaring the district from the Mount, 23/2.

* Spinetailed Swifts - or Needletails if you prefer - were seen at North Castlemaine just before a storm on 2/2. Rita Mills.

* One of the walkers on the Great Dividing Trail walk was telling me that she is not a bird watcher but she and her husband like birds and put up some nesting boxes in their back yard. They were both very upset one morning to find the "Mountain Lowries" dead under their nesting box - killed and apparantly thrown out by Common Mynahs which had taken over the box. Rita Mills

* At Lorraine Rye's property at Chewton the Sulphur-Crested Cockatoos have destroyed their walnut crop, and have even been in the oaks - including the pin oak in the street - stripping them of acorns. They've also been busy in the nearby pines.

* Also at Rye's a baby Blue-tongue has appeared. The old lizard has had a kind of nest of leaves in the corner of the work shed for some time, and they wonder if "she" is the mother of the baby.

* This lizard story comes from Shirley Parnaby. "In the evening of one of our warmest days I discovered a large Blue-tongued Lizard completely submerged in the flat terracotta dish of water I provide for various creatures, his head only above water. We thought he may have been sick, but after a while he climbed out and strolled off through the grass, obviously quite normal!"

* Seen by Phillip West at the Gower School area, 26/12/97 6.45am - 9.30am : Musk Lorrikeet, Australian Raven, Galah, Magpie, Kookaburra, Noisy Miner, Fuscous Honeyeater, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Eastern Rosella, White-browed Babbler, Grey Shrike-thrush (inc. 1 imm.) Magpie Lark, Brown Treecreeper, White-browed Woodswallow (nest) Yellow Robin, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Crested Bellbird (1♂ and 1♀), Diamond Firetail, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Chestnut-rumped Heath-wren (3 birds), Dusky Woodswallow (nest), Willie Wagtail, and Little Lorikeet.

NOTE I would appreciate it very much if you have something for the Observations page if you would write it down (a scrap of paper or the back of an envelope will do), giving a few interesting details if possible, and hand it to me at the meeting - after you've made your report, of course! - or leave it at Tonks Bros, and ask them to hand it on, please. Ed.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.
Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.
Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

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Fri. Mar. 13 **A Five Year Survey of Birds at Moyston.** Speaker, Simon Kennedy. UCA hall, 8.pm

Sat. Mar. 14 **Dawn Breakfast at Glenluce.** Leave 15 Gaulton St. at **6.45am.** Bring picnic breakfast and binocs. (These outings are a delight and shouldn't be missed! Ed.)

THE APRIL MEETING AND EXCURSION ARE PART OF THE HERITAGE WEEK PROGRAM, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO JOIN US ON BOTH OCCASIONS. NOTE THAT BOTH HAVE BEEN BEEN BROUGHT FORWARD 1 WEEK TO THE FIRST WEEK IN APRIL.

Fri Apr. 3 **Geology and Landscape of the Castlemaine District** and its influence on the vegetation. Speaker is E. Perkins. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat Apr. 4 **Pennyweight Flat/Kalimna Walking Trail** circuit.. Leave Victory Park at 1.30pm and return at approx. 4.15 pm. There will be a small charge of $2. A picnic afternoon tea, provided by the club, will be served at Kalimna Point on the way back. Leader is E. Perkins.

Sat May 9 **Tour of Muckleford Forest.** Leader is E. Perkins. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30 pm sharp.

Sat June 13. **Firth Park, Trentham East.** Leave 27 Doveton St. 11am.

Fri 11 to Sun. 13 Sept. **Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.** Put this weekend on your calendar now. If you can help in any way please let the secretary know. Speakers for the weekend are :-
Friday - John Landy and
Saturday- Dr Tim Entwisle of the Melbourne Herbarium

Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Mildura.**

* *

Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), John Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, B. Envall.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single $16, Family $24
Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18 Supporting : $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

For Landcare Month - Sun. Mar. 22 at Creswick Nursery and Landcare Centre ***Landfest '98*** 'Living with El Nino'. Stalls, displays, music, produce, Bureau of Meteorology, etc, etc!! $2 entry, $5 family. More info. tabled at Mar. meeting